



The Importance of State Archives



Documenting Government

Promoting History

Securing Rights



The Importance of State Archives

State archives play a critical role in preserving the nation's history and the rights of its citizens. The dramatic growth in state government activity during the twentieth century was accompanied by an exponential surge in the production of permanent records. Government records face unprecedented threats and opportunities, and state archives are evolving to meet the challenge.

State archives

- » **Collect the records that make transparent government possible;**
- » **Preserve evidence of civil and property rights;**
- » **Ensure that rapidly changing technologies do not create a new “Information Dark Age”; and**
- » **Protect the nation's most essential records from natural and man-made disasters.**

In doing so, state archival programs provide appropriate, unbiased, and effective stewardship of the historical records in their care. Consistent funding and support for the work of state archives enables them to effectively manage and make archival records widely accessible, take advantage of evolving technologies, and foster innovative projects and research.

WHAT STATE ARCHIVES DO

Secure Rights

State archives identify and protect essential records for use by citizens, communities, and businesses.

Government records are especially important because they protect the legal, financial, and historical foundation for the state and its citizens. State archives identify and preserve those records. Deeds and maps protect property rights; laws and court records protect civil rights; and records in the archives can ensure the rights of individuals to essential information and services.

THE IMPACT – SAVING LIVES:

- Following a 2002 accident at the Quecreek Mine in Pennsylvania, historic maps created by Pennsylvania state mine inspectors were used to identify closed tunnels where the nine miners might have taken refuge. The miners had harbored in just such a tunnel, and the archival maps led to their rescue.

THE IMPACT – SERVING THE NEEDS OF CITIZENS:

- An elderly woman, living in federally subsidized housing, faced eviction if she was not able to comply with new federal rules requiring an official certificate of her birth date. Her family turned to the Idaho State Archives which provided a certified copy of the Idaho census to fulfill this requirement.
- A widow in Pennsylvania needed documentation of her husband's military service to obtain veterans' burial benefits. The state archives provided a copy of his World War II compensation application to fulfill this requirement.

THE IMPACT – SUPPORTING THE QUEST FOR JUSTICE:

- An oral surgeon in Washington began to pursue the "cold case" relating to the 1951 murder of his grandfather by a hitchhiker. Working with state archival records from the Montana Attorney General's office and prison records, he learned of the murderer's release from prison in 1969 and subsequent violation of parole and disappearance. Further investigations found the missing murderer running a wedding chapel in Arizona under an assumed name. This discovery led to the individual being taken into custody and returned to the Montana State Department of Corrections.

WHY RECORDS MATTER

Records are essential to protecting life.

- » Medical records allow doctors to successfully treat patients.
- » Maps, floor plans, and infrastructure records help rescue workers safely locate disaster victims.

Records are essential to protecting property.

- » Plats, deeds, and mortgage records establish ownership of real property.
- » Probate records and wills prove inheritance.
- » Divorce records include property distribution.

Records are essential to protecting rights.

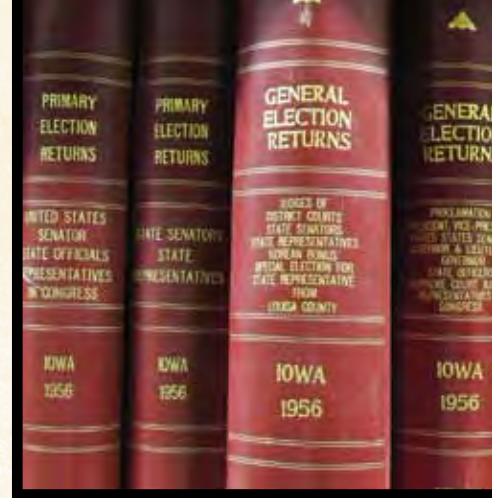
- » Adoption and guardianship records protect children and establish parental rights.
- » Military service and employment records provide access to pensions and other benefits.
- » Court records document findings in criminal and civil cases.

Records are essential to restoring order following a disaster.

- » Businesses need proof of assets, liabilities, contracts, and other legal obligations.
- » Governments need documentation of decisions, regulations, precedents, and lines of succession and authority.
- » Individuals need proof of identity, medical histories, and documentation of assets.
- » Communities need historical records to retain a sense of continuity with the past on which to build a future.

WHAT STATE ARCHIVES DO

Document Government



State archives hold essential information for use in legal proceedings.

Every state is regularly involved in a range of court cases and legal disputes. Many of these, particularly land disputes, require evidence from decades—if not centuries—past. State archives preserve records that are essential for legal defenses. When the government cannot provide key evidence to defend itself, court costs and settlements can be significant. Likewise, records can be used as state's evidence in cases that result in significant settlements for the state.

THE IMPACT – PROVIDING EVIDENCE:

- In Alaska, the Attorney General's office has relied on state government archival records in many legal cases relating to oil spills and royalty oil tax matters resulting in billion-dollar settlements for the state. In a pipeline corrosion case that settled in 2012 for \$250 million, hundreds of thousands of archived emails and electronic records from 55 executives were instrumental in supporting the state's position. State government records have also been essential in reaching a \$500 million settlement in a lawsuit over actuarial misconduct and breach of contract relating to state employee pension funds.
- Litigants in *State of Florida v. The American Tobacco Company, et al.* used records from the state archives relating to the advertising and sale of cigarettes to support arguments for damages resulting from smoking and tobacco use.
- In a case before the U.S. Supreme Court regarding whether Delaware had the authority to block a liquefied natural gas plant built on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River, the state presented a number of documents from the Delaware Public Archives as evidence, including a 1682 land charter from King Charles II of England to his brother, the Duke of York. The court upheld Delaware's authority based on this and other supporting documents.

State archives support government effectiveness and transparency.

Government officials serve best when they make informed decisions. One key to such decisions is knowing what was done in the past—what worked, what failed, what lessons might be learned—so previous accomplishments can be built upon and costly mistakes can be avoided. State archives preserve the documents that spell out previous policies, approaches, and decisions—documents that inform present-day decision making and policy creation.

Research requests from the state legislature and state agencies are part of the daily routine of state archives. Without archivists to properly care for and provide access to the records of the state, important precedents and rich resources would be lost.

THE IMPACT – PROVIDING HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

- In the wake of an unpopular court decision, the Vermont legislature took up the question of whether to impeach the justices of its Supreme Court. The state archives provided context about how the impeachment process had been used since 1779 and the nature and extent of its provisions in the state constitution. The history provided factual, objective context for consideration in a potentially heated debate.

State archives save tax dollars by increasing government efficiency.

Like people everywhere, government agencies tend to keep records, “just in case we need them one day.” The result: expensive office space—and server space—is used to store unused and unneeded records, and agency employees waste time—and tax dollars—searching for records buried in the overflow. When state agencies have legal permission to destroy outdated records, they are less likely to waste tax dollars by keeping them. Most state archives determine (or help



determine) what records government should keep and what they can dispose of. State archives work with local governments, too, and help them increase efficiency through better management of their records. Efficient management provided by the state archives not only saves taxpayers money—it improves government transparency and accountability as well.

THE IMPACT – HELPING GOVERNMENTS SAVE MONEY:

- New York state government saved over \$2.4 million in 2009 because the state archives identified and scheduled the disposal of more than 300,000 boxes of records no longer needed.

State archives help local economies by bringing in tourism dollars.

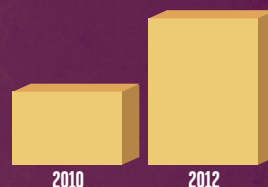
State archives—like museums, art galleries, and historic sites—attract tourists to a state. Family history and genealogy, the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, immigration, western settlement, and cultural heritage have become major reasons for tourism in the past two decades. State archives hold the stories of all of their citizens who paid taxes, were educated, served in the military, voted, and encountered government for a wide range of reasons. Government records provide connections to the past in very tangible, approachable ways for people with specific, compelling interests in their heritage.

THE IMPACT – ENHANCING THE LOCAL ECONOMY:

- On average, visitors to state archives contribute between \$2.5 million and \$5 million annually to the local economy. An economic impact of government archives nationwide study conducted by the University of Michigan demonstrated that archives bring “cultural tourism” dollars to their states. Over 69% of visitors to archives came with that institution as their primary destination, 57% shop or use local services during their visit, over 70% eat in nearby restaurants, and 57% spend between \$100 and \$500 during their trip. That translates into more revenues for local businesses.

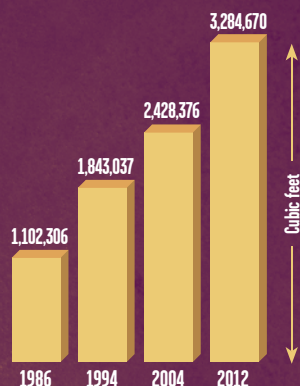
BY THE NUMBERS

Requests Fulfilled by Archives



- » State archives respond to more than 1 million requests for information each year, a 200% increase between 2010 and 2012.

Growth of Records in State Archives



- » Total volume of paper and non-electronic records in state archives continues to increase at a rate exceeding 4% or more each year. Archival holdings are in excess of 3.2 million cubic feet across the country in state archives.



- » 92.7% of state archives provide records-related services to local government records centers.

WHAT STATE ARCHIVES DO

Preserve History



State archives help prepare the next generation of responsible citizens.

Engaging elementary, secondary, and high school students in the study of history and government is challenging, because the past often seems remote, dense, or complicated. Historical records can be used to strengthen students' critical thinking skills, teach them to assess different viewpoints, and help them understand how social and cultural context can influence actions. State archives help teachers meet core curriculum standards and engage students in the functions of democracy. Many state and territorial archives are also involved in History Day competitions, helping students to connect in very tangible ways to historical records in their own state or locality by bringing an authentic touchstone to their understanding of history.

THE IMPACT – SUPPORTING CORE CURRICULUM:

- The Florida Virtual School, Florida's online K-12 public school, uses digitized resources from the state archives collections as educational resources for their online classes.
- Resources from the New York State Archives are used for document-based questions on state standardized tests.

THE IMPACT – EDUCATING YOUTH:

- Each year across the nation, middle school and high school students participate in History Day and are welcomed into archives to explore primary source materials. In the U.S. territory of Guam, the limited amount of details about the Micronesian region in history books encourages students to delve into the professional papers of the island's political and civic leaders to find details about an event or person. The students who conduct research into the primary documents of the island's history begin asking more questions about their island's history and on current issues related to their island.

- A third-grade class was shown an original manumission document for a slave by staff at the Maryland State Archives. This led to a discussion with students about needing to carry freedom papers everywhere like individuals today carry a driver's license. This simple conversation among eight-year-olds led to a much more sophisticated discussion of what being owned versus being free meant, and further, grappling with the possibility of being separated from their family that African American families of the period routinely faced during slavery. In this instance, an experience with a record quickly brought the class a more nuanced understanding of the deeply complex topic. To support this kind of learning, the archives develops *Documents for the Classroom* packets and places them online to make primary source material available to teachers on all levels, and staff members conduct hands-on teacher training seminars on their use.

State archives are a resource for personal research and family history discovery.

Records in state archives reflect the lives of the wide range of people in every state and territory. Government connects with individual lives in many ways—censuses, taxes, court proceedings, education, and property ownership being only a few. As a result, state archives are an important resource for individuals seeking information about their families and communities for personal, medical, and legal reasons. State archives are where we can meet and connect with the people who inhabit our personal histories.

THE IMPACT – CONNECTING FAMILIES:

- A woman in her seventies was attempting to locate her brother and sister with whom she had not had contact during her lifetime due to adoption. Records were located in Wyoming District Court adoption files and school censuses that made it possible for a confidential intermediary to contact and reunite her with her brother and sister.



- A Virginia resident noticed a feature article about The Library of Virginia's military records collection in her local newspaper. The article was illustrated with a photograph, selected at random from the collection, of Owen Minnix, a soldier pictured in his World War II dress uniform holding his young daughter. According to the records, Minnix became a husband at age 18, a father at 20, and a casualty of war at 22. The Virginian who saw the article was the young girl in the photo. She knew her father's name but had no memory of him, and did not know a photograph existed showing her with her father. A copy of the photograph is now among her family's most prized possessions.

THE IMPACT – PROVIDING HEALTH INFORMATION:

- A woman seeking information on the mental illness of her grandmother received records, letters, and photographs from the Indiana State Archives that provided important medical insights on diagnosis and treatment of her condition.

State archives enhance quality of life.

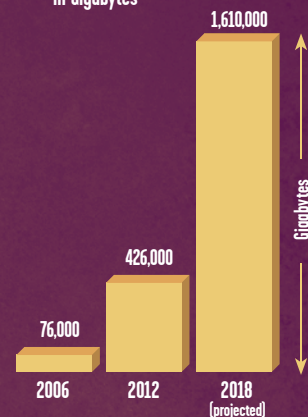
For decades—even centuries—state governments have gathered data that has substantive value to researchers trying to improve quality of life. State archives' records have helped researchers and reformers tackle topics as diverse as welfare, epidemiology, criminal justice, educational reform, migration and immigration, and environmental affairs, to name just a few. Such studies can lead to important changes in public policy that improve the conditions in which residents live and the services they receive.

THE IMPACT – SUSTAINING THE FUTURE:

Biologists in Georgia hope to reintroduce the American chestnut, the beautiful tree that once lined America's streets but was all but wiped out by a fungus in the 1930s. One key to success is planting trees where they are most likely to thrive; to find such places, one biologist thought to use records in the state archives to determine where the tree had originally flourished. Using state maps from the 1820s, in which surveyors had marked lots by recording which tree species grew at their corners, he formed an excellent picture of locations where the American chestnut had grown well in the past, thereby producing a guide for the replanting efforts.

BY THE NUMBERS

Electronic Records Held
in Gigabytes



- » The number of gigabytes of electronic records held by state archives has grown by more than 500% since 2006. More than 425,000 gigabytes of digital material is cared for currently; this number is expected to exceed 1.6 million gigabytes by 2018.



- » State archives receive a growing number of unique website visitors, now more than 65 million annually. The total number of hits on state archives websites exceeds 2 billion each year.

Your State Archives Welcomes You!

Here are just a few ways you can engage the state archives to support you and your constituents:



- Introduce yourself to your state archivist and ask for a tour of the archives.
- Visit the website of your state archives. You'll find great resources there. Provide a link from your website to the state archives services that can help your constituents.
- Attend an archives-sponsored event. Many host public programs with speakers as well as workshops.
- Host one of your events at the state archives.
- Use illustrations from your state archives for your reports, brochures, and constituent communications.
- Follow your state archives on social media.
- Feature your state archives at a press event.
- Encourage your colleagues to explore the archives!

ABOUT CoSA

The Council of State Archivists is a national organization comprising the directors of the principal archival agencies in each state and territorial government. Under regulations of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), the State Archivists also serve as the State Historical Records Coordinators who chair their respective State Historical Records Advisory Boards (SHRABs). Working collectively through their membership in CoSA, the State Archivists encourage cooperation and promulgation of best practices among the states and SHRABs; define and communicate archival and records concerns to the national level; and work with the NHPRC, its parent agency, the National Archives, and other national organizations to ensure that the nation's documentary heritage is preserved and accessible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



This document has been prepared by the Council of State Archivists to identify the importance of the programs and functions provided by the state archives programs in the United States. Data for this report has come from CoSA's biennial surveys and the CoSA membership. "By the Numbers" statistics are from the FY2012 Survey of State Archives and Records Management Programs.

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